

Lent Devotional March 20, 2019

SCRIPTURE

Romans 1:28–2:11

^{1:28} And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. ²⁹ They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. ^{2:1} Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ² You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." ³ Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ For he will repay according to each one's deeds: ⁷ to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

DEVOTIONAL

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In 1992, my son Carl got AIDS. As African Americans, we first sought help from within that community, but it was the openly gay white community whom God used to change Carl's heart, though Carl wasn't gay. That community quickly embraced us unconditionally, poured out their love on us, shared their resources, even invited us on retreats, which we attended. We met some of the most funny, happy, and loving people. They knew they were loved and supported among themselves and countered the blame and condemnation from others. Carl began seeing them as individuals, not society's image of them, and through their acceptance of Carl God changed his heart. One day he said to me, "Mom, if I hadn't gotten AIDS, I wouldn't have come to know Jesus."

During this season of Lent, let us confess that we all need a change of heart, and it begins with accepting Jesus and knowing the truth of God's word. In 1992, Carl passed. Oh, thank you Father for changing his heart, for saving him and showing him that we are all sinners saved by grace. Oh, to be loved by you.

Our text from Romans warns against all kinds of lifestyles that dishonor God. Too many of us excuse our sinful ways by pointing fingers at others. But let us not deny anyone the same access to God's forgiveness, love, and grace as the rest of humanity. As Christians, our witness should be to the unsaved—to those who do "not see fit to acknowledge God" (1:28). Let us not pass judgment, for in doing so we "condemn" ourselves, since we are also sinners. Let us humbly recognize today that, indeed, "God shows no partiality" (2:11).

PRAYER

Dear great and loving Father, how foolish so many of us show ourselves to be. Yet how gracious and unconditional you are in your love for and patience with us in spite of our blame and shame. Oh, how your heart must grieve seeing how we continue to condemn those we believe do not deserve your love, often because we feel we don't deserve it ourselves. How beautiful that your family consists of all kinds of people. Thank you, Abba, that you are no respecter of persons, that you show no partiality. Chastise us, Lord, for always asking for help and praying for forgiveness, yet never allowing you to change our attitudes and hearts. Forgive us, oh God.